

Our Work –

Environment – Lobby Page

The natural resources available to people for food and other production, maintaining healthy lives, and the pleasure of a beautiful landscape — perhaps filled with wild animals -- can seem boundless. But growing populations are placing increasing pressure on the resources in many countries and many of these resources, once used, are not renewable. Fresh water supplies -- essential for agricultural production, for drinking, for maintenance of important habitats of animals – are projected to be inadequate to meet the needs of one-third of the world's population by 2025, unless better use is made of this precious resource. In many coastal areas, pollution has reduced the quality of the water, affecting the health of coral reefs and fisheries and the lives of the many millions of people worldwide who make their living by fishing in oceans and bays. Forests are being cut down faster than they are being regenerated or planted. Tropical forests, in particular, are an important source of biodiversity, that is, plants and animals.

USAID takes an integrated approach to natural resources management. Land and water must be managed skillfully so that they are able to maintain our basic ability to produce food for the nine billion people that the world is expected to have by 2050. Food supplies must increase by 40 percent while the land available for farmers to expand production is estimated to be only 10 percent more than is already being used. Water supplies must be used more efficiently – and water quality must be maintained or even improved if people are to remain healthy. More than 2 million children are estimated to die each year from diseases caused by drinking dirty water.

Forests must be protected by those who live in or close to them. New approaches to involving these people in the wise management of a resource important to everyone in the world are being developed and applied in many areas. Sound methods for harvesting trees for timber integrate economic goals with environmental management goals, community management of forest areas integrate community needs with innovative approaches to eco-tourism. These kinds of programs promise to slow the rate of deforestation, especially in tropical countries. However, illegal and destructive logging remain a threat to biodiversity conservation. Once lost, it will be impossible for the world to recover that diversity which has provided us with the bases for new medical drugs and other benefits.

USAID's programs in natural resource management are closely linked with programs to improve health, increase agricultural productivity, mitigate or adapt to climate change, and even governance – in this case, governance of the environment.